



## **Sustainable Development and the Challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Perspectives on Cultural, Political, and Industrial Dimensions of Sustainable Agenda

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## Preface

This project draws on the work of an international think-tank – based at Oslo University – which has been working to revitalize and further develop the idea and practice of Sustainable Development. Our research team has brought together specialists from a wide range of areas – anthropologists, sociologists, political scientists, technocrats, economists, philosophers and cultural historians<sup>1</sup> – that have been especially interested in proposing concrete and more effective means of social mobilization and exploring a synergic model of innovation towards sustainability.

The concept of sustainable development has different nuances in different translations: the Norwegian focus is on “bearing capacity”, the English translation highlights durability and conservation, the Polish one points to “balanced development,” and in some other languages it is translated as “a balanced householding.” These translations have one feature in common: they point to “restraint” and “balance.” There are reasons to believe that it is partially due to its “restrictive” semantic core, and the lack of a positive myth attached to the concept, that sustainable development has lost some of its mobilizing power over the last decade. At the same time, the dramatic climate change at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has rekindled the debate about an urgent need for innovative cultural, techno-economic, and political solutions which would limit damage to the environment and society.

Taking these new developments into account, our research team has set out to accomplish three objectives: 1) To propose a scenario of sustainable development which would focus on transcending existing cultural, political and economic barriers to

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<sup>1</sup> Members of the core group include: Prof. Yeraswork Admassie/University of Addis Ababa; Prof. Tom R. Burns/ Stanford University; Prof. Jose Maria Caldas/ Instituto Superior de Cientos do Trabalho e da Epresa, Lisbon; Dr. Marcus Carson/ Stockholm University; Prof. Paddy Coulter, Oxford University; Prof. James Lovelock, Cornwall; Hunter Lovins/ Natural Capitalism Inc; Prof. Alberto Martinelli/ University of Milano; Dr. Mikael Roman/ Stockholm Environment Institute; Prof. Sverker Sörlin/ Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm; Prof. Bron Taylor/ University of Florida; Ass. Prof. Kristina Tiedje/ University of Lyon; Prof. Philippe Schmitter/ European Institute, Florence; Prof. Atle Midttun/ Norwegian School of Business, Oslo; Prof. Jin Wang/ Sun Yat Sen University, Guangzhou; Prof. Nina Witoszek/ SUM, Oslo University.

sustainability; 2) To rethink sustainable development in terms of a positive, mobilizing story, which would liberate the creative potential in the existing social, economic and cultural structures; 3) To attend to the cultural and ethical dimension of our sustainable future, and thus re-humanize the largely technocratic approaches prevailing in many domains and disciplines.

We owe a debt of gratitude to the Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of the Environment for their financial support and invitation to present the project at the United Nations conference in New York in May 2007. Our work has also progressed thanks to the kindness and support of the institutions and colleagues: the Norwegian Research Council, Prof. Jose Maria Caldas and his colleagues from the Instituto Superior de Cientos do Trabalho e da Epresa in Lisbon; Prof. Reinhard Nauman and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation; Prof. Ulf Sporrang of the Swedish Vitterhetsakademi; Dr. Alessandro Palanza of the Italian Parliament Library in Rome, and Ilze Girgensone of the Villa San Michelle on Capri.

## **I. Do We Need a New Story?**

Two enduring myths underpin discussion of the fate of civilization. One is apocalyptic, based on ideas of gradual decline towards Armageddon. The other, a millennial story, is confident that civilizations are by their very nature able to mobilize self-correcting mechanisms, to produce antibodies to fight the deleterious effects of their own growth. *The Brundtland Report*, with its therapy of sustainable development, undoubtedly falls into the second, optimistic category. It continues a didactic tradition exemplified by such groundbreaking documents as the Decalogue, the Koran or the Torah. It exhorts. It berates. And it proposes a code of conduct to ensure salvation. There is one difference, however: whereas earlier texts were addressed to a particular community or class, *The Brundtland Report* appeals to humanity as a whole and speaks in its title of "our common future."

The report has been revolutionary in three ways: 1) It has sewn together two ostensibly irreconcilable concepts – environment and development – and sought to convince diverse regions and social groups of the world that they were dependent on one another; 2) It launched a Marshall Plan for humanity that would tackle both the environmental crisis and the problem of social justice. "We have the power to reconcile human affairs with natural laws and to thrive in the process," the report declares reassuringly. The question is: do we really have this power?

Humanity, as we know, has few respected spokesmen, no universal leadership, no payroll, no budget and no army – and its main forum, the United Nations, is seldom united. Yet Brundtland has had a dramatic salutary effect. The idea and practice of sustainability have been embraced both by governments and civil society in many parts of the world where they have reduced the negative effects of the industrial revolution by lifting many people from abject poverty. Sustainability is transforming education, communication, building and medicine and has made many parts of the world more prosperous and humane than they would otherwise have become. At the same time, however, we have arrived at a state of planetary emergency: most nation states have failed to move decisively towards sustainability. The rich have increased their conspicuous consumption, while many of the poor have become poorer. We know now beyond any shadow of a doubt that the cumulative effects of unlimited growth in human population and increasing per capita consumption have precipitated severe damage to ecosystems and the biosphere. Our failure to respond meaningfully has been as much due to the lack of political will as to the absence of an imaginative vision to mobilize the masses.

We have chosen to read our current predicament not as the “revenge of Gaia” but as her challenge to us. We acknowledge that the dimensions of crisis are so dramatic that we must expeditiously develop a global plan to unite humanity and fend off the well known scenario, not just of a Hobbsian ‘war of all against all,’ but of walls and bastions of indifference. The need for a new paradigm is clear. To quote Einstein: “You can’t solve a problem with the same kind of thinking that created it.”

Like the *Brundtland Report*, we would like to propose action based on the politics of hope rather than the politics of fear – and we seek to revitalize the agenda of sustainability in the new and challenging context of today. Admittedly, the world has changed since the *Brundtland Report* was written in 1987. Twenty years later we are all affected by both positive and negative impacts of globalization. Transnational corporations are increasingly important actors, both benefiting and harming people and the environment; new forms of communication have made education, propaganda, and terrorism faster and more effective than ever; organizations other than governments and corporations apply pressure and increasingly influence legislation and regulation, but also exploitation; the energy crisis creates both hardship and opportunities; social migration leads both to exhilarating international identities and to the exacerbation of nationalist sentiments. Never before has humanity been so mobile, and never before has it been confronted with such massive challenges to its own security. The affluent, Cartesian West is no longer an unassailable, rational manager of the world order: today it has to reckon with forces which it has long tried to dismiss or suppress – forces of identity, culture and religion.

It is precisely this cultural dimension – one that was absent in *Brundtland Report* - – that we would like to make the starting point of our vision. Our vision can be treated as a draft of a still unwritten 14th chapter of *Our Common Future*.<sup>2</sup> Our two driving questions are: 1) How can we transcend existing cultural, political and economic barriers in such a way as to move culture and enterprise decisively toward a more sustainable future? And, 2) Can we think of synergic models of thought and action which would

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<sup>2</sup> The actual Report includes 12 chapters. We've chosen to be superstitious and skip chapter 13.

inspire us, create better political conditions of sustainability, and civilize capitalism in the process?

Let us begin by looking at the agenda of sustainability, not as a policy document, but as a value-charged *story*. Here is our first thesis: among the greatest obstacles to the project of sustainable development is the one that is rarely acknowledged, namely, that the most fascinating, compelling stories that have nourished our imagination since time immemorial have to do with excess, profusion, abundance, a sense of ending or shock.

For millennia we have been captives of the myths of excessive goodness, badness, suffering, curiosity, riches, love: from Adam and Eve, through Faust, King Solomon, *carpe diem*, King Midas, Dynasty and Dallas, and most of today's "reality" shows that tell us how to become rich, famous and... unhappy. In short, since the beginning of time people all over the world have been most drawn to stories that have inspired behaviour which has wrecked the planet. We have been attracted to myths of boundless wealth, power and glory in the same way we are not drawn to the penitential, ascetic story of living low on the food chain and as simply as possible. This is so pronounced that when the concept of sustainable development was first introduced in Poland – a part of the world where democracy hitched a free ride to victory on the back of consumerist triumphalism – it was instantly redefined as "an equal distribution of disappointments between this and following generations." The hunger for Western style capitalism has been all too easily dismissed by some Western observers as a vulgar craving for Disneyland, Mac Donalds and cheap sausages. What one forgets is the deep longing for a world of plenty that has consistently been denied to the wretched of the Earth, from China to Ethiopia.

Conclusion: We need a compelling story about sustainability which would capture the imagination of rich and poor alike. After all, it is through stories that we become active participants in our culture, and it is through stories that we acquire identity and ‘make sense’ of what is happening around us, what has happened, and what will happen. What are the stories that offer a sustainable scenario which not only feels right but is also sexy?

Our cultural team has reviewed environmental folktales and myths from all over the world to uncover a wealth of environmental stories which provide moral guidance. In most of these stories we encounter wise fools or underdogs who change the world through their ingenious inventions and direct connection to nature: here we could mention North and Meso-American tales of the Wesakachak, the African stories of Yo in Benin, Oceanian tales of Maui tiki tiki or myths about the Australian Aborigine Bamapana. In anthropological parlance these characters are called tricksters: comic survivors who challenge the accepted doxa about the ways of the world and do the impossible through their resourcefulness and partnership with nature. One of the most enchanting trickster stories which encapsulates almost all components of a possible new sustainable vision comes from Norway. The story tells us how to get rich, happy and popular without hurting nature and losing human decency along the way. It is the story of Askeladden.<sup>3</sup> Its protagonist is a lovable idler who sits by the fire all day, poking and fiddling with the ashes. Out there on a farm – for this is, after all, Norway BO (Before Oil) – lives a peasant king who is troubled by hostile natural phenomena and who promises his daughter as a reward to any lad who can solve his problems. Askeladden's

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<sup>3</sup> The adventures of Askeladden were collected in the nineteenth century by Petter Christen Asbjørnsen and Jørgen Moe and published first in *Norske folkeeventyr* in 1845-1848.

elder brothers set out to accomplish the task through the conventional means, i.e. reckless competition and a square-headed problem solving. After they have failed, Askeladden enters the scene and wins the kingdom and the princess through a unique, ecological code of action. He succeeds because 1) He is a great energy saver and goes about his tasks without trying too hard, 2) He treats nature as his partner: always staying attuned to it, listening to its suggestions, 3) He relies on innovation, investing in unconventional, short-cut solutions. 4) He is a compassionate soul, always helping the poor and the needy; 5) He has faith – he trusts his good luck.

Is Askeladden a possible “totemic ancestor” of the sustainable world, a hero that needs to be planted in school handbooks, advertisements and TV programs? Let us review: The Norwegian peasants that created him, inhabited a world of limited resources. They relied not just on moderation and wise use of resources, but on the creative mindset – the ability to bypass conventional solutions and invest in imaginative short-cuts. Their favourite hero embodied sensitivity to nature’s needs and limitations as well as compassion for the needy and the weak. Their ethical code stemmed from a partnership with nature, because only partnership, not ruthless exploitation, guaranteed survival.

There is one more reason as to why Askeladden should be our role model: it shows that the right kind of story can do magic. Let us consider that at the beginning of the twentieth century Norway was still one of the poorest countries in the world, and that for the last few centuries Norwegian children have been fed an empowering tale about a humble boy who becomes rich by being kind and believing in his luck. Norway anno 2007 is a stunning example of the Askeladden myth made flesh: a “Kuwait of the North”

which has preserved much of its pristine nature; a relatively egalitarian community whose royalty specializes in marrying Askeladdens; a place voted for the fourth time in a row “the best country to live in;” a home to the environmental thinkers Arne Næss and Gro Harlem Brundtland; an international peace broker par excellence.

To move away from the Norwegian success, modern versions of innovative Askeladdian sustainability are all around us: they are written by those who have not been afraid of dreaming the seemingly impossible, whether Muahammed Yunus spreading the gospel of microcredit and empowering Bangladeshi women, or Wangari Mathaai reclaiming both human dignity and natural environment in Kenya, or the ecological visionaries of Colombian Gaviotas, who defy the absence of wealth to create a civilized and sustainable city. These are not just cases of environmental sanity but feats of imagination, community building, and deep humanism. But first of all, they are all part of an inspiring story about innovative adaptation, a story which we desperately need if we are to survive on our increasingly fragile planet. After the American, revolutionary *Declaration of Independence*, there is now a need for a new *Declaration of Interdependence*<sup>4</sup> – one which will mobilize citizens in all corners of the world to become co-creators of sustainable future.

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<sup>4</sup> See “8 Points of the Humanist Agenda”, p. 49.

## **II. Do We Need a New Politics of Sustainability?**

The *Brundtland Report* had a political strategy – the only one imaginable given the nature of the international system at the time. The pursuit of sustainability was essentially a matter to be decided by sovereign national governments. Since its problems transcended all national borders, their resolution required intergovernmental agreements that were global in scope and the United Nations offered the only framework for conducting such negotiations. Once member governments had signed the relevant treaties, they would ratify and faithfully execute them – with supplementary assistance from new and/or pre-existing, specialized UN organizations. None of these assumptions was completely wrong, but we now know – after two decades of highly visible global conferences, multiple international declarations of good intention, several intergovernmental treaties and, now, three weighty intergovernmental reports – that they collectively turned out to be insufficient. The world is not more sustainable than it was – quite the contrary – and it is hard to discern whether all of these efforts have made any appreciable positive difference. The Report was innovative in its analysis of problems, but conventional in its political strategy for solving them.

It is, therefore, time to try a new strategy. Fortunately, world politics have changed dramatically in the 20 years since Brundtland. Features that were barely discernible in the mid-1980s have become major trends. What is needed is a

common strategy that takes into account the complexity of the problem and the momentous political changes of the past twenty years.

Our proposed strategy, “From Inter-governmental Agreements to Infra-governance Arrangements,” is composed of four principal dimensions. None would suffice alone to guarantee sustainable development. They are “points of departure,” rather than a “point of arrival.” Given the manifest urgency, we have concentrated our attention on what to do within a predictable time frame. We are convinced that policies based on the following strategies will produce some positive results by themselves, but more importantly they will set in motion processes of innovation and experimentation that will increase in scope and consequence in the future.

1. **Governance rather than Government:**

Governance works not through formal monopolistic institutions exercising ultimate authority over a specified territory, i.e. **states**, but through informal arrangements of actors exercising some degree of control over diverse functions, i.e. **networks**. Such arrangements are open to participation by different types of actors – public and private, profit and non-profit, national and trans-national, expert and amateur, producer and consumer, large and small – who have been identified and accepted each other as “stakeholders.” What these actors have in common is an enhanced awareness of interdependence. They have conflicting objectives, but depend sufficiently upon each other so that no one can simply impose a solution on the other and all would lose if no solution were found. They

know that their respective contributions are needed to varying degrees if some problem is to be solved or some public good is to be produced. Moreover, they also know that the solution cannot simply be bought in the market or commanded by the government.

It is precisely their informality in both composition and operation that makes them so appropriate as a starting point for tackling sustainability issues. They can be “chartered” initially by virtually any level of government or even sets of private institutions. Their decision-making proceeds by consensus – not by unanimity or voting. Moreover, actors in such arrangements can collectively set standards and set up monitoring systems without having to go through formal processes of ratification.

In other words, governance arrangements may fit better the political conditions of a “Post-Brundtland” world that has lost its clear demarcations of national sovereignty, that has to cope with problems cutting across entrenched functional specializations, that has generated a wide variety of actors insisting on their right to participate and that has not yet produced a global system of government. They are not, however, the definitive response to the challenge of sustainable development. For the foreseeable future, such arrangements will still ultimately have to face the test of market competition and to rely on the legitimate coercion of state authorities. They cannot stand alone.

## **2. Partial rather than Comprehensive:**

Sustainable development demands nothing if not comprehensiveness. It requires that multiple and relatively autonomous domains of human endeavour be coordinated. The problem is that governance arrangements work best when they are partial, i.e. when the stakeholders involved are relatively few in number and highly dependent upon each other. These arrangements may be useful in overcoming the “intergovernmental” limits imposed by national sovereignty, but how effective can they be in bridging the differences in knowledge and interest embedded in distinct functional domains?

The simple answer is that we do not know. Only innovation and experimentation can tell. Can stakeholders in one domain – owners, employees, experts, interest representatives and civil servants – learn from what others have accomplished? Will participants engaged in solving their problems of sustainability even perceive the positive and negative effects that their efforts have upon others? Will entirely new scientific fields emerge to deal with the interstices between different governance arrangements? Can one even imagine something like “mergers and acquisitions” in a future in which initially separate governance arrangements combine to deal with more comprehensive issues?

Our strategy of relying on governance to accomplish sustainable development is definitely paradoxical. It proposes to use a partial instrument to reach a comprehensive objective. At best, it offers the promise that dispersed efforts by isolated groups of stakeholders will not only not collide with each other, but eventually lead to a more encompassing approach. However, unsustainability is increasing at rapid pace and something has to be done sooner

rather than later. Of course, a more comprehensive system for assessing risks and allocating responses would be preferable. Alas, we do not have that option for the foreseeable future.

### **3. Regional rather than Global:**

Not only should sustainable development be comprehensive in functional substance, it should also be global in territorial scope. Its most basic principle is that the world has become one. There exists only one eco-system and an increasingly integrated economy. Awareness of this has grown, but the world is no closer to creating a political mechanism at the global level for identifying policy priorities, setting relevant standards, raising necessary resources, supporting collective efforts and, when all else fails, punishing defections from the common good. National states still try to do this and they necessarily do so in a highly unequal and self-regarding way.

But they are no longer alone. One of the most significant changes since Brundtland has been the emergence of ‘trans-national regions.’ Between the global and the local in some parts of the world – and nowhere more so than in Europe – there now exist complex, ‘multi-layered’ political systems in which the responsibility for using public authority is shared across different territorial levels and the implementation of policies requires constant cooperation among them. We are convinced that, given the disappointing results of trying to reach global agreements and empower global intergovernmental organizations, this

intermediate ‘regional’ level provides us with a ‘second-best’ strategic alternative.

And the fact that the European Union – now expanded to include 27 countries – is in the vanguard of such developments is especially encouraging. This region of the world has the collective resources – material and human – to make a highly significant contribution on its own. The existence of a supra-national organization with a proven capacity to generate benefits for all of its members and of a population that is more aware than almost any other of the costs involved in ‘unsustainable development’ are more than coincidental. The citizens of the EU uniquely expect their regional organization to do something about these risks. Another significant factor is that Europe – within and beyond the EU – already possesses the key elements of a continent-wide civil society that can play a crucial role in identifying priorities, diffusing best practices and pressuring for ‘spill-overs’ from one domain to another. This region does not yet have a distinctive supra-national party system, but it could emerge in the near future and sustainability issues could well determine its configuration.

Europe is not alone. Other world regions have been making more timid efforts at cooperation and even integration: NAFTA, MERCOSUR, APEC, ASEAN, AU, and so forth. Virtually all these organizations look to the EU for inspiration and the EU has looked back at them with various cooperation programs and some trade agreements. For decades now, the EU has been pursuing an ambitious policy of political conditionality with regard to

democracy, human rights and the rule of law in the countries bordering or trying to join it. It could very creatively extend its influence to other world regions by insisting on respect for common principles of sustainable development as a condition for concluding further agreements – and by offering its own directives and regulations as models for such an effort.

#### **4. Humanist rather than Technocratic:**

Resisting the codex of sustainability has been a perpetual and even a desirable feature of human existence. We have always wanted more than we have and, hence, been threatened with the prospect that we will outrun the “carrying capacity” of the world that sustains us. Countless times in the past, profound thinkers have announced that these limits had been reached – only to be proven wrong.

The usual explanation for this error in judgement has been innovation. Humans constantly “tinker” with the conditions surrounding them. What is important to note is that, important as they may have been, not all of this tinkering involved material technologies. Perhaps even more important have been the cultural and social innovations that have led to major transformations in the norms that give meaning to what we want and in the collective arrangements that we apply to get what we want. To sum up: All changes in policies and political institutions should seek to accomplish one or more of the five following objectives:

1. Ensure the representation of future generations in decision-making by contemporary politicians.

2. Provide incentives to decision-makers so that they will be encouraged to take the long-term effects of their actions into account.
3. Improve the scope of accounting systems to include inter-generational and non-monetary effects.
4. Provide for mechanisms of representation that transcend national borders in order to monitor for externalities produced by one system upon another.
5. Impose obligatory contributions or compensatory actions on all unsustainable, resource depleting exchanges.

### **III. Do We Need a New Model of Business and Commerce?**

#### **Six Anchors for a “Civilized” Market Economy**

##### **1. Introduction**

In 1987 the Brundtland Commission acknowledged the significant role business plays in “our common future” with respect to the creation of social welfare and fulfilling the aspirations of the poor. However, it also acknowledged the problematic consequences of traditional industrial growth: resource depletion and environmental externalities. The Commission sought to solve this dilemma by advocating sustainable growth, primarily through public policy intervention at national and international levels, but also, to some extent, through dialogue at the local civil society level (Agenda 21).

Over the last decade the self-regulatory potential of industry, often in partnered governance with public policy, has come to be seen as a major tool for promoting sustainable development, thereby introducing new options for policy implementation. We have also seen new economic growth taking less resource-depleting paths, a move driven in part by rapid technological innovation. In the spirit of the humanist agenda and its vision of a society based on a creative partnership with nature and empathy for our fellow human beings, this section on the “business dimension” explores trends, developments

and self-regulatory initiatives in the modern economy that may stimulate sustainable growth. The discussion will focus on the following six issues:

- First, one of the dominant trends over the last decade has been a massive industrial focus on corporate social responsibility (CSR). The CSR agenda clearly reflects a humanizing element in industry (social and environmental concerns, in addition to financial). The CSR agenda has also spilt over to the financial industry, in the form of socially responsible investment (SRI), which is now rapidly expanding and promises to exert a “civilizing” influence on the global economy.
- Second, the strong CSR orientation of industry enhances the feasibility of a partnership with government and civil society in order to achieve more balanced global economic governance. It is the ability to blend different forms of rules and authority, thereby strengthening its outreach, that characterizes partnered governance. Legal sanctions, that in the context of weak governance are not themselves sufficient, may, for instance, trigger industrial action and sanctions based on commercial power, which in turn deliver on humanizing policy goals.
- Third, the development towards service and experience economies in advanced mature markets, indicates that growth may take on qualitatively different dimensions, with greater emphasis on culture, design and creativity and a reduced focus on the production of material goods. From a humanist perspective, this carries the double promise of art, culture and experiences becoming more central to the economy, and of a decoupling of growth from resource depletion.

- Fourth, further development of globalization points beyond Western hegemony towards a “multi-polar” model, where resources and competencies become more widely distributed across the world. If wisely governed, globalization could also become a vehicle for improving conditions in developing countries and thus contribute to lifting large groups out of poverty.
- Fifth, the strong drive for innovation in the modern economy allows us to put technology to work in order to solve the problem of trade-offs between prosperity and ecology. Innovation coupled with the values and visions of a humanist sustainability agenda may redirect economic development in new directions, where needs can be met and economic growth can be achieved in a new, sustainable manner.
- Finally, the cooperative entrepreneurial model suggested by this year’s Nobel Prize Laureate, Mohammed Yunus, complements the global market economy with a promise to those currently left behind. It is a means of putting the dream of entrepreneurship and empowerment on the agenda for those at the bottom of the pyramid, an improvement that should gradually prepare new groups for a fuller participation in global market economy.

The following sections explore these aspects in greater detail.

## **2. CSR and the humanist agenda**

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has placed important, broader humanist issues on the business agenda. This humanizing reorientation has come in response to political reactions to globalization and de-regulation, following the neo-liberalist wave of the

1980s and early 1990s. The core issue is how industry can take on greater and more direct societal responsibilities, in contrast to the neo-liberal cultivation of a sharp division between profit-maximising firms on the one hand and societal responsibility anchored in public policy through market design and regulation on the other.

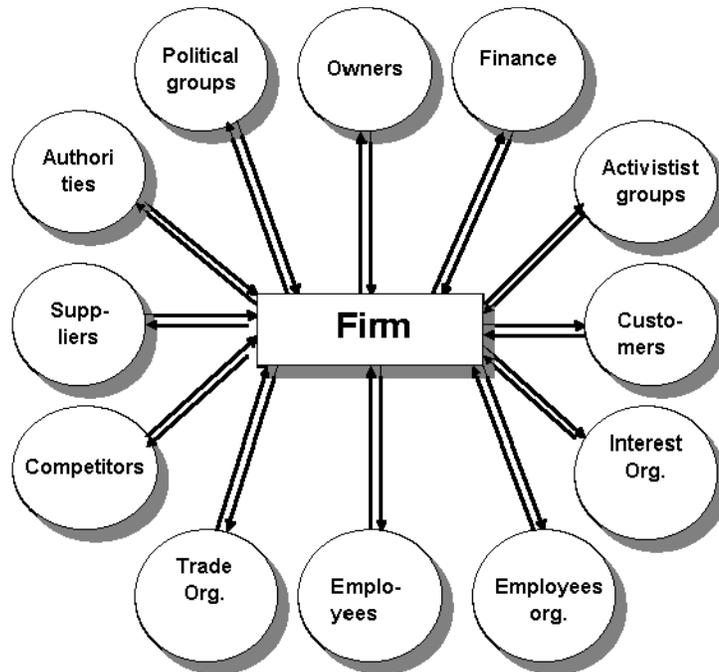
The drive for Corporate Social Responsibility can be seen in a number of initiatives for improvement of governance and social and environmental practices. Some initiatives come from business itself, such as Keidanren's "Global Environmental Charter" in Japanese industry, a "Global Code of Ethics for Tourism" or the "Extractive Industries' Transparency Initiative." Other initiatives come from international forums and international conventions, such as the UN's Global Compact, OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, or the OECD Convention on Bribery of Foreign Officials in Business Transactions. In addition, there are a number of national legislative initiatives aiming to place corporate responsibility higher on the business agenda. Last but not least, corporate social responsibility has been promoted by a number of initiatives from interest groups, such as the Forest Stewardship Council which established a regime for responsible forestry (1993), and the Ethical Trading Initiative which established guidelines for socially responsible trade (1998).

At the enterprise level, the CSR challenge entails incorporating social, environmental and governance dimensions as central elements of business strategy. For most large and medium-sized Western companies, CSR now occupies a central place on their agenda, and for global companies, in particular, CSR has become essential.

The broader business agenda requires firms to justify their strategic plans, not only vis-à-vis shareholders and public authorities with regulatory responsibility, but also

vis-à-vis a broad group of stakeholders, who are affected by the firm's operations (figure 1).

*Figure 1: Freeman's stakeholder model.*



CSR mandates that the firm build up a reputation and communication strategy not only focusing on product quality, but also on the social and environmental aspects of business operations. Furthermore, the CSR focus leads firms to contribute to the development of local infrastructure and societal development. With the renewed interest in the environment and global development, large, socially responsible firms are also expected to contribute to solving global problems, with strategic engagement in their fields of competency.

Admittedly, the business case for CSR has been relatively pragmatic and related to business-enhancing goals, such as how CSR might enhance conflict management,

facilitate reputation building, stimulate development of industrial clusters, support risk management, and so on. Modern communicative society may bestow de facto bargaining power on social and environmental stakeholders, and given their ability to inflict reputation damage through media exposure on modern, vulnerable, brand-oriented businesses, the CSR agenda may become more compelling. The CSR agenda, once adopted, may thereby acquire a dynamic of its own, where symbolic commitments turn into hard realities. Additionally, it is now becoming far more common for financial institutions to engage in positive – and some cases negative – screening strategies, where companies are screened for social, environmental and financial performance. Such SRI practices, and related ratings on social and environmental performance at both the New York stock exchange (Dow Jones Sustainability index) and London stock exchange (FTSE for Good) also increase pressure for serious CSR implementation.

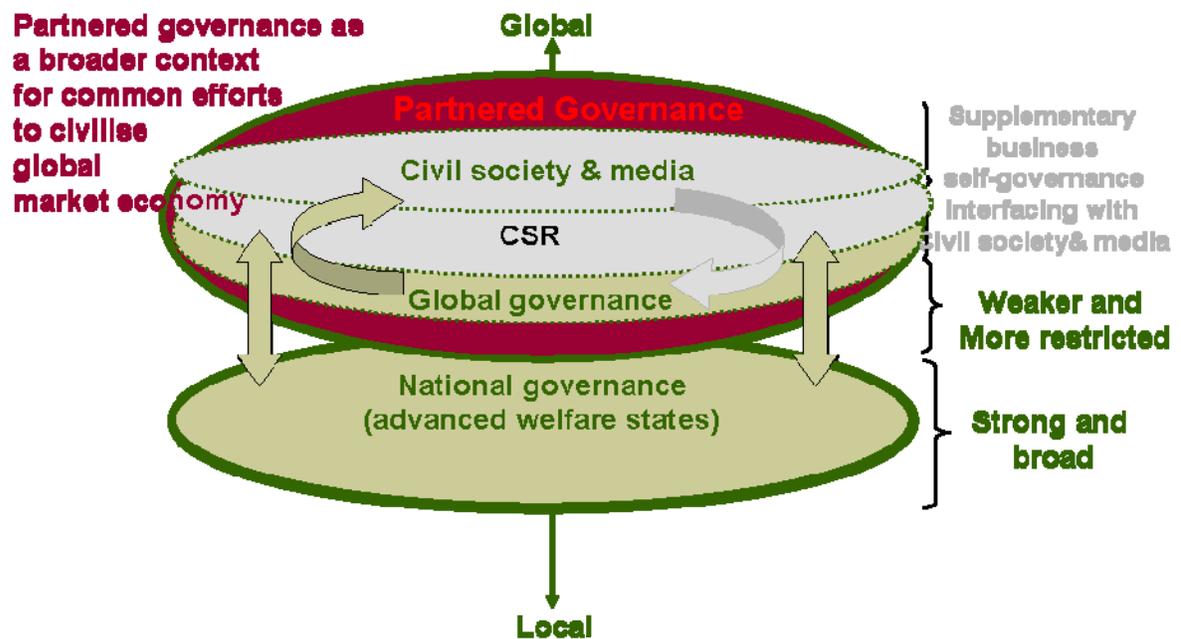
Although firms are constrained by the need for profitability, the CSR agenda enhances the feasibility of a business partnership with society in humanizing and civilising the global economy. One clear advantage of such a partnership is the potential to harness the efficient managerial capabilities and resources of corporations and, as long as civil society organisations and public authorities are engaged in a critical and independent overview, the risk of co-opting is limited.

### **3. A case for partnered governance**

It is widely recognised that the globalization of the economy is accompanied by a limited capacity to develop parallel global governance through democratically or inter-governmentally mandated institutions and agreements. One way to fill the regulatory gap and push for a humanistic agenda alongside the commercial one has been recursion to

corporation-led self-regulation or purely corporate-focused CSR, as discussed in the previous section. However, there are also attempts emerging to coordinate corporate self-regulation with public policy in what we have termed “partnered governance.” CSR-oriented partnered governance may provide a contribution towards solving problems of collective action in a globalizing economy in several fields: by unleashing creativity and creating synergy with industrial strategies; by mobilizing industrial implementation capacity; and by government following industry in making social and ecological demands on their own supply chains. Making use of a rich repertoire of participants, strategies and tools, partnered governance carries the promise of improved outreach for a broader humanist agenda that also promotes social and environmental governance in a predominantly free-trade-oriented global economy (figure 2).

Figure 2: Partnered Governance



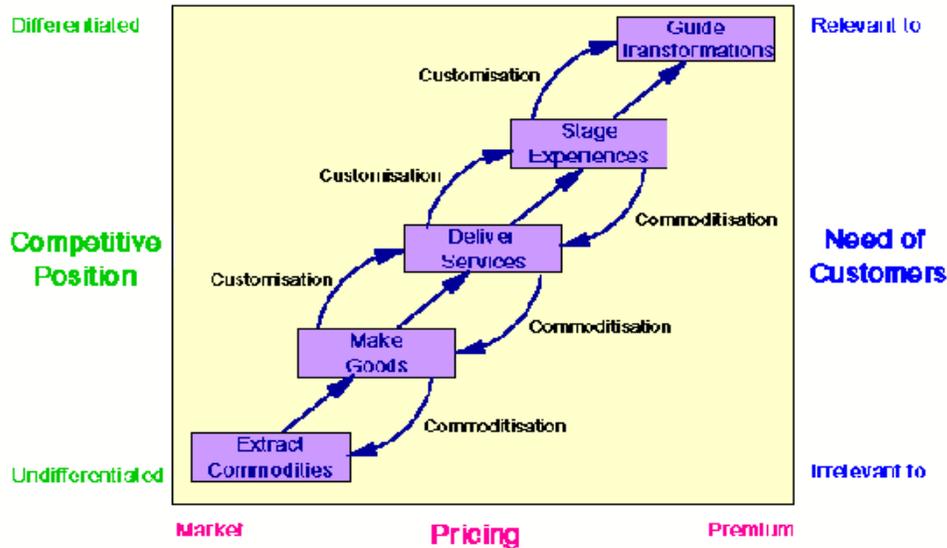
By blending government and business-based authority, partnered governance may develop considerable governance synergies, thereby strengthening the scope of a socially and environmentally responsible industrial agenda. Legal sanctions that in the context of weak governance are not themselves sufficient may, for instance, trigger industrial action and sanctions based on commercial power, which in turn deliver on sustainability-oriented policy goals. Given its multinational presence and organisation, international business may orchestrate crossovers between national jurisdictions so as, in some cases, to effectively impose advanced regulation on corporate strategies throughout the world.

For a humanist agenda, partnered governance may to some extent compensate for the rather one-sided neo-liberal institutionalization of the world economy, as illustrated by the World Trade Organisation, which clearly lacks an operational social and environmental policy to match its strong operational policy on free trade.

#### **4. Transition to less resource-depleting service and experience economies**

Over the last couple of decades we have seen a clear trend: mature economies are developing more and more into service and experience economies, with design, quality, culture, communication and interactive participation gaining prominence over production of material goods. The service and experience economy has interesting ecological implications in so far as it decouples economic growth from material resources. While the agriculture-based economy dealt mostly in raw materials and the industrially based economy dealt mostly with mass manufactured goods, the developing economies of our time are expanding the provision of services and experiences (figure 3).

Figure 3: Progression of economic value<sup>5</sup>



The Progression of Economic Value, © B. J. Pine II, J. H. Gilmore, Harvard Business Press

From a humanistic point of view, the development of a service and experience orientation in advanced economies carries interesting implications. Firstly, the cultural and design component is promising because it entails engagement and refinement rather than further material consumerism in societies where material consumption is already very high. Secondly, the decreased material content of the economy also carries the promise of lower resource depletion as economic growth is decoupled from material goods. This would potentially leave more resources for developing economies that need to make the transition from an agricultural to an early industrial economy.

Admittedly, the decoupling of the experience economy from material production is not absolute. Sometimes the experience economy is intimately linked to resource-

<sup>5</sup> From B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore *The Experience Economy: Work Is Theatre & Every Business a Stage*, published in April 1999 by Harvard Business School Press.

depleting activities such as travel – as is the case of tourism – where the strain caused by carbon emissions is high. To the extent that the experience component significantly increases travel, the resource-decoupling effect is therefore questionable. However, in other parts of the experience economy, this may not be the case.

#### **4. Globalization and development**

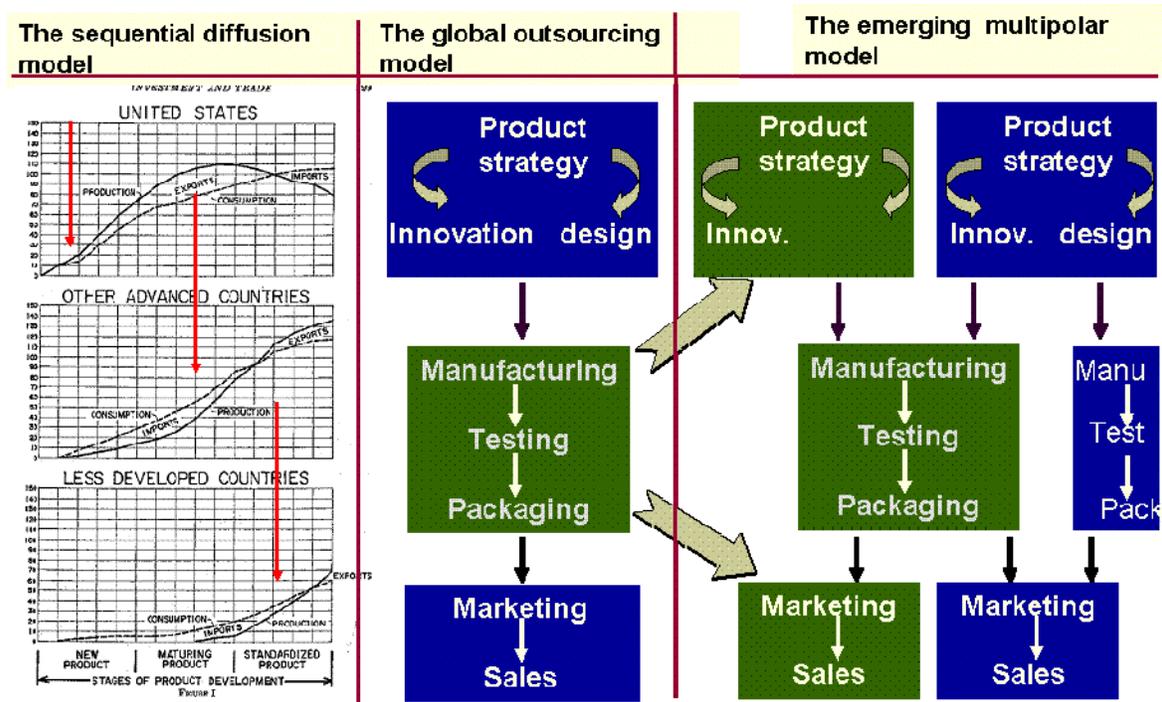
Globalization and economic growth are often seen negatively by many people with a progressive or environmentalist agenda in developed nations, as well as by traditionalists in the developing world. Yet for many poor nations, being able to take a full part in globalization and economic growth is regarded as the main possibility to achieve prosperity. This dilemma was a central challenge to the Brundtland Commission, and led to its argument for sustainable development which promotes growth, as well as social and ecological dimensions. Since then, globalization has advanced rapidly, and we are now faced with new options, but also new dilemmas. On the one hand, globalization carries the promise of advanced economic development in new regions of the world, especially as globalization moves beyond Western hegemony. On the other hand, the extensive environmental challenges associated with material resource based growth stand out more dramatically today than they did 20 years ago.

The potential for globalization to be a tool for prosperity in developing countries relies not only on expansion and regional outreach, but also on a qualitative change in the roles that Western and developing countries play in the global economy (figure 4).

Western hegemony during the post-war era of globalization implied a *sequential relocation of production systems*, as technologies matured. The basic idea was early development of technology in the West and later diffusion to developing countries.

The outsourcing model, which gained prominence during the 1990s and early 2000s, implies more simultaneous interfacing of industrial systems in advanced and developing countries. Strong drivers behind this model have been optimization of labour costs and acquisition of resources across the globe. Functionally this means control, design and marketing in the West with production by suppliers in developing countries.

Figure 5: Models of the global economy



However, the outsourcing model in the Western-led globalization model also contains the seeds of a more multi-polar organization of industry in which the new growth economies assert their authority and independence to an increasing extent. The promise of the multi-polar model, with more independent roles for developing countries, is that it becomes a powerful tool for increasing the quality of life of disadvantaged populations.

Some of the factors driving towards mutli-polarism are:

- Growth economies in Asia are capitalizing on lucrative labour and resource deals to attract FDI (foreign direct investment) & technology transfer from leading multinational corporations.

- Export-led growth from Western outsourcing vitalizes industrial capabilities in developing countries.
- There is a strong innovation strategy for placing cutting edge technology in growth markets rather than in mature economies.
- As new growth economies prosper, they also expand lucrative domestic consumer markets for global industry.

If properly challenged by civil society and political communities, globalization could become a major proponent of a humanist agenda. Through the spread of markets, technologies and organizational practices, globalization has the potential to further economic prosperity in developing countries, and lift large populations out of poverty.

Globalization may not only spread wealth and cutting edge technology, but also increased labour rights, as well as health, safety and environmental standards.

Globalizing firms are often CSR leaders that have promised to uphold a high level of the social and environmental standards in their global operations. With extensive global outsourcing, such standards are also contractually imposed on local suppliers, as this is accepted as a part of good CSR practice. Supervising such practices ranks high on the surveillance agenda of CSR-oriented NGOs.

### **5. An innovation agenda for sustainable growth**

The history of modern industrialization is a story of extensive growth and prosperity, but in some ways it is also a destructive story of exploitation of resources and environmental pollution. For a number of years the IPCC has warned that emissions of greenhouse

gasses, a result of economic growth, are far beyond the limits of a stable climate on earth. Lifting millions out of poverty through economic growth in the developing world must therefore either imply dramatic cutbacks in emissions and resource deployment in the developing world or a different kind of growth trajectory. Over the course of the twenty years since the Brundtland Commission published its report, innovation has risen significantly on the business agenda. It has considerable potential to help us out of the “growth trap.”

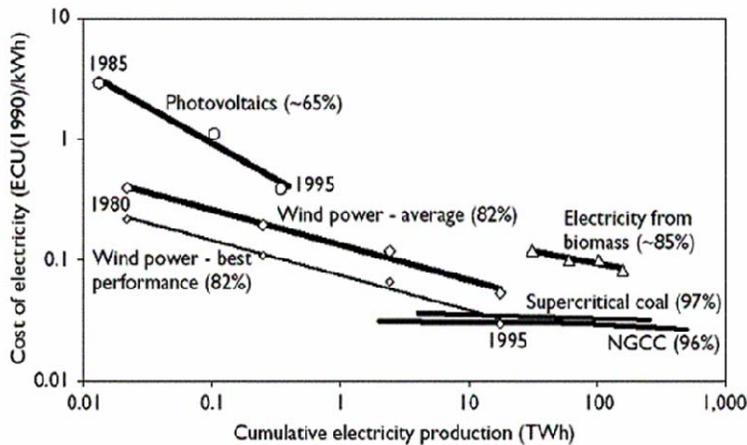
An enlightened humanist agenda with a vision of socially and ecologically balanced growth may constitute the basis for a policy vision that carries hope. If industry can be convinced to expect future demand for clean technologies, backed by proper support and incentives, it will transition substantial resources and capabilities to this end. Among the policy initiatives necessary to make this happen are: clear visionary statements from policy leaders; research and development commitments; construction of niche markets; and institutional facilitation of clean technologies such as priority lanes for non-polluting cars.

From learning curve theory, there are good reasons to expect massive performance improvements in new sustainable technology solutions if policy allows them to enter the market. Given initial stimulus for market entry, there is a positive price-growth cycle: market growth stimulates product improvement and reduces price, which makes the product more attractive, supporting further growth which further reduces price and so on.

A recent IEA study illustrates the potential for – and consequences of – innovation in the power sector in the European Union. Policy measures have provided

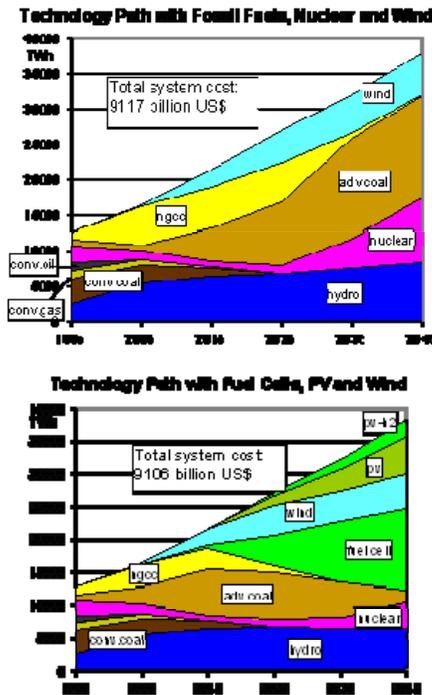
niche markets for new technologies and stimulated investments for wind power, photovoltaic and biomass technology. As illustrated in figure 5, wind produced electricity at the sites with best performance can already compete with production in coal-fired power plants. However, the figure also shows that photovoltaic and biomass technology require considerable improvements in performance before electricity from these technologies can compete with electricity from fossil fuels.

Figure 5 Learning curves for energy technologies (from IEA)



Based on learning curve dynamics and least costs static efficiency considerations, the IEA projected two alternative scenarios for world energy generation by 2050, both within the same cost range (figure 6). The “business as usual” scenario perpetuates conventional technologies based on extensive use of coal. The alternative scenario of systematically developed renewable technologies and new energy carriers gradually diverges into a far less CO<sub>2</sub>-consuming option. The alternative scenario relies on initial investments in new green technologies that gradually get improved over time.

Figure IEA Scenarios



*Development beyond traps and deadlocks*

Guided by a humanist perspective and targeted towards a sustainable technology agenda, the innovation approach carries the promise of liberating us from the growth versus environment trap and the ensuing zero-sum bargaining game between developed and developing countries. Instead, sustainable-technology-oriented innovation carries the promise of “clean growth” and a sustainable development agenda.

Given its strong focus on market-driven technology development, modern innovation theory suggests massive investment in cutting edge technology development and market deployment in the new growth economies where the learning potential is greatest. To this end, clean development mechanisms in accordance with the Kyoto agreement – as well as other plans for financial investments from advanced and resource-rich in developing countries – will need to be developed further. In order to make the

vision of decoupling growth from environmental degradation come true, we need massive transfers of technology and capital from advanced countries to developing countries and to the new growth economies. In return, advanced countries may gain industrial opportunities, thus creating a win-win solution.

## **6. Alternative business models for the bottom of the pyramid**

Even with greater diffusion of the globalized market economy there will still be a need for supplementary approaches originating from local initiatives closer to the bottom of the pyramid. In a world with numerous heroes like “Askeladden”, the Ash Lad of Norwegian folk tales, nobody can win their princess without a struggle; they may well need support and encouragement before they, too, can set off on their adventurous journey to prosperity.

Large segments of the world population are still not integrated in the modern world economy. Whilst working to make modern commercially driven business models more encompassing, we therefore also need to see alternative business models with a thriving bottom-up social perspective providing a pathway out of poverty. Indeed, many of today’s advanced economies were highly reliant on such local initiatives in their build-up phase.

Until these regions and social strata of the population become parts of the globalizing market economy, they may need to engage in alternative ways of developing their capabilities and social welfare. This year’s Nobel Peace Prize to Mohammed Yunus and his cooperative Grameen Bank remind us of the need for such alternatives. It is worth taking note of his claim that cooperative business models, driven for public good and not

created solely for profit, may make valuable contributions to development and welfare. Such business models carry the promise of helping people out of the poverty or aid trap.

Much can also be said for cooperative ownership, as in the case of the Grameen bank, which encourages engagement and responsibilities between the participants involved. Borrowing money from members of your local community may provide stronger incentives to pay it back than when the money has been borrowed from distant international banks. Furthermore, local commitment to lending may also be accompanied by a deeper understanding of the constraints and possibilities in shaping local business. Historically, cooperatives and public ownership have played a major role in infrastructure provision and early economic development in many of today's advanced economies within sectors such as farming, fisheries, water, energy, telecommunications, retailing, housing, health and education.

Micro-finance, with its expectation of a return on investments, represents a further step towards a commercial business model. The focus on business models for the bottom of the pyramid is maintained, with investors expecting normal profit. At this point micro-finance may attract the interest of capital markets, with the promise of considerable scaling-up. Over time and with increased prosperity, the foundations may thus be laid for greater participation in the global economy.

#### **IV. Do we Need a New Communication and Education Strategy for Sustainable Development?**

There have been huge advances in communicating about sustainability since the publication of the *Brundtland Report* and it would be churlish to downplay them. There have been successive surges of media attention, with the publication of “Our Common Future” contributing significantly to the mainstreaming of the sustainable development agenda. Perhaps even more importantly, Brundtland prioritized education for sustainable development and much has since been done in our schools and other educational institutions. But the hard fact is that the proper “education for sustainability” has not yet been achieved.

What is new – indeed what was barely conceivable in the 1980s – is the revolution in information technology which is relatively inexpensive, accessible and – crucially – inter-active. The cost of access has decreased markedly with the expansion of access to all levels of society.

Treating the communication revolution as a starting point, the goal is to inspire the people of the world to become and remain active participants in building a globally sustainable society that benefits everyone. This requires a process of communication and education that engages people and develops their understanding of the essential ideas on which a sustainable society can be built.

One cannot fail to notice that, since Brundtland, television has become the dominant medium of communication in the Middle East and many parts of Asia – no

longer just in North America and Europe. Mobile telephony has been taken up at a phenomenal rate in Africa and other poor regions – such as the Philippines where it has proved a useful tool for social and political mobilization. The internet has come to penetrate societies around the world and can be found in “nodes” or centers in multitudes of rural towns, even villages.

This profound and ongoing technological change removes barriers to the consumption of news and other socially valuable information. It also offers the potential of a global audience to anyone with a personal computer – and, of course, an internet connection and software. It is no longer necessary to be a mogul to become a significant media player.

In this new scheme of things, “*small actions can be significant*” argues the influential development thinker, Robert Chambers in his “Ideas for Development” book published in 2005. “*International action by citizens and civil society can be coordinated in ways that were unimaginable before the 1990s.*”

It is important to take into account how people in each of the stakeholder communities view their own current situation in relation to the global condition and how they might view the changes envisioned in Chambers’ scenario. Clearly, these are widely diverse groups in terms of language, culture, environment, national identification, education, literacy levels, and access to communication. While some information is available from existing surveys and studies, additional studies are needed to inform the development of communication strategies.

In most communities, stakeholders are not equally represented in polls, public dialogues, and governance processes. It is important – not only from an ethical

perspective, but also for reaching people who play different roles in society – that even those stakeholders who do not yet see themselves as such are identified.

Efforts should be better coordinated with other organizations and agencies, not only to make use of their knowledge and networks, but also to keep the humanist sustainable development message from being confused or conflated with other issues. This story encompasses many aspects covered as separate elements by other groups – e.g., global climate change, forestry management, fisheries, and development of green technology. Therefore any effective communication and education initiative has to both build on these separate elements and ensure that people have the discernment to remember the bigger picture.

This suggests a three-pronged approach to communicating the message widely over the long time period realistically needed for such profound changes in society. The three components of the communication strategy are as follows.

### **1. The Mass Media**

Like them or loathe them, the mainstream media are indispensable for catching people's attention since in most societies they remain the most used information source for most people. The wide circulation of Al Gore's "An Inconvenient Truth" documentary film attests to the continuing impact of "old media." However, their coverage of sustainable development issues is fitful and patchy at best and there is a pressing need for innovation and creativity in devising new development stories (and new ways of telling old stories) for a more sustained coverage. The UK provides an instructive example: mainstream television used the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio as a "peg" for a flurry of special one-off programmes on the environment and development. But then, almost immediately, as if to

counteract the commitment to the environment, the UK television ended regular peak program series such as BBC's "Nature" and Channel Four's "Fragile Earth."

- It is imperative to engage the mainstream media fully – journalists, producers, editors and owners. At first sight a Global Media Alliance for Sustainability seems to be an attractive idea, but there is a need for a clever strategy, as setting up yet another entity for time-pressed media organizations is not really useful! The way forward includes the following tactics: 1) Playing within existing media cultures and structures, initially at the local and national levels; 2) Bringing senior media figures together with sustainable development specialists, especially scientists, at special get-togethers on neutral ground, (where universities can be ideal co-organizers and venues); 3) Using existing international media platforms – such as the World Association of Newspapers (WAN), the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) and similar regional counterparts such as the World Society of Editors – to increase the importance of sustainable development on their agendas; 4) Boosting media literacy strategies to sharpen media consumers' capacity to critically analyze and evaluate the media they use. Again, no grandiose organizational initiative is required – just imaginative seed funding from donors for the most inventive educational projects and for national awards.

## **2. The "New" Media**

Mass media publicity surges on sustainable development are not in themselves sufficient for engaging people in the long run. These need to be complemented by resources which

encourage and support long-term participation and commitment to action. Such resources include local people with specific knowledge and experience, local organizations that can act as distribution centers for information and contacts, and local venues for public learning and dialogue. And there are existing networks of science centers, community and religious centers and local non-governmental organizations which can provide the infrastructure to support this long-term effort, if they are also supported. Even in places where there is little or no telecommunications access, the establishment of contact with a person or group that has access and can act as a hub for communication with the wider local community is essential.

The mobilization for sustainability stems from the way the new communications technologies allow more voices to be heard. Think of the expanding community radio station network in Africa and the impact of lively radio talk shows and phone-ins boosted by mobile telephones in the hands of ordinary people allowing dissent and an exchange of information and opinion to be heard. Or think of the myriad of new media channels referred to earlier. UGC (User Generated Content) may be an ugly acronym but it has been adopted, indeed embraced, by the mightiest of media organizations. In Korea “OhmyNews” – an internet platform of citizen journalism - has drawn on UGC to emerge as a major media force in the country.

This development has not been properly appreciated in the field of sustainable development. It is in fact enormously significant for two reasons:

- Authorities can be held up to public scrutiny much more effectively – there is, for example, useful research showing how the allocation of public resources for

primary education in Uganda has increased significantly in areas benefiting from independent media.

- It permits the emergence of world public opinion on a greater scale than before, precisely because the internet is global in its reach. BBC Online has started to exploit the potential in triggering a genuinely two-way global debate (and it is interesting to note that in 2005 the BBC commissioned its “Voice of the People” global survey).

The potential for new media as a tool in “partnered governance” – as advocated in other parts of in this publication – could be extremely useful, particularly in situations of tough trade-offs. We are familiar with public service radio and public service television but there is still no notion of a new media public service provider. Again, the recommendation is not for a single Global Sustainability New Media Public Service Publisher – though in the fast-changing reality such an entity may just emerge overnight! – but for international donors to support the development of a plethora of ingenious local new media initiatives as pilots – with pump-priming finance and assistance to ensure their long-term viability.

A feedback loop must be established between local efforts and national, regional, or global networks. When a genuinely reciprocal process of communication and local, user-generated content has spread around the world, it will significantly change the dynamics and power relationships between citizens and authorities. This allows public scrutiny and, crucially, a mechanism for engaging citizens in monitoring accountability. The feedback loop nourishes both the global effort and individual stakeholders.

### **3. Education**

Education, as the *Brundtland Report* acknowledged in its fourth chapter, plays an absolutely crucial role. The aim must be to adapt education to provide each person with the necessary understanding and capacity to be able to contribute positively to a sustainable future for everyone. A great deal has been done in the educational sector since the publication of “Our Common Future.” Indeed the UN-declared 2005 to 2014 the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development and Agenda 21 – which emerged after the Rio conference – has done a lot at the level of local authority to encourage the re-orientation of all streams of education, both formal and informal, towards the sustainability agenda. Chapter 36 of Agenda 21 specifically discusses re-orienting education towards sustainable development, and encompasses all streams of education

Public attitudes have yet to change. A recent UK survey, for example, revealed that only a third of the British people accepted climate change as a serious challenge. As already noted, in spite of noteworthy efforts to strengthen Education for sustainable development, many challenges remain. In particular, there is a need:

- to integrate science and education for sustainability;
- to strengthen co-ordination and collaboration between different levels of education for sustainable development; and
- to mitigate knowledge gaps between different parts of the world.

It is necessary to consider the scope and sequence of content and develop a strategy for incorporating the agenda of sustainability into formal and informal educational processes. A key challenge is identifying what parts of a current curriculum can be altered to include fundamental ideas of sustainable development. The material on sustainability will generally not be accepted as a significant additional portion of a

curriculum. It must be creatively intercalated into the existing frameworks or used to illustrate ideas in the current curriculum. This is dependent on the national or local curriculum and textbooks, and must be considered at each level of education. (A useful model for mapping concepts onto primary and secondary educational content which could be used in regard to sustainability is the Atlas of Science Concepts, created by Project 2061 in Washington, DC.)

One segment of the public that is particularly important is children from 9 to 14 years old – those in upper elementary and middle schools. This is an age at which the interest in and connection to a transformative story is likely to be high and the social implications appealing. It is also the age at which more sophisticated patterns of thinking can be developed and strengthened. After this period of early adolescence, interest in learning often drops precipitously and it becomes harder to engage some teenagers and older youth who have distanced themselves or been disconnected from school and learning.

A substantial global network of institutions that focus on the public communication of science has developed rapidly in the last three decades. Their mission as informal learning centers has been to reach out to their constituent communities and engage them in learning about the social implications of science as well as in a broader sense. Community institutions with an informal learning agenda, including science centers, museums, zoos, and aquariums, are excellent venues for dialogues and presentations on many aspects of sustainability. They employ personnel, many of whom are experienced and adept at engaging the public in dialogue. These institutions develop and display interactive experiences for visitors of all ages and backgrounds. The

exhibitions can be either permanent or traveling. The latter are often more cost effective and allow smaller institutions to present their visitors new experiences that they cannot afford to develop and produce by themselves.

For example, three science centers that have addressed aspects of global sustainability – largely climate change – with exhibitions and other media are: the Exploratorium in San Francisco, USA; Science North in Sudbury, Ontario, Canada, and the Marian Koshland Science Museum in Washington, DC. The Exploratorium ([www.exploratorium.edu](http://www.exploratorium.edu)) has produced a number of webcasts on related topics, which have been seen by individuals all over the world, as well as featured in many other science centers. Science North ([www.sciencenorth.on.ca](http://www.sciencenorth.on.ca)) has produced a traveling multimedia exhibit entitled, “The Climate Change Show.” A set of permanent exhibits focusing on climate change are featured at the Koshland Museum ([www.kosland-science-museum.org](http://www.kosland-science-museum.org)). The Koshland museum also hosts well-publicized symposia for the community on the same issues.

In collaboration with such informal learning institutions, it is possible to promote the creation of media products, educational curricula, and professional development workshops based on the humanist sustainable development agenda and distribute them through the networks that connect these institutions. The two largest networks – the Association of Science-Technology Centers (ASTC), based in Washington with worldwide membership and the European Network of Science Centres and Museums (ECSITE) – are effective conduits to nearly all such institutions worldwide.

Schools at all levels from primary to university should be a significant part of the strategy. The challenge will be to create or adapt materials that fit within the curriculum

and convince educators that the material is an essential part of the curriculum at all levels. This will entail enlisting the support of the school administration, the colleges that educate current and future teachers, and the teachers themselves. Pre-service and in-service workshops will be needed for teachers to become familiar with the content and purpose of the engaging sustainable story and ways to bring this story into their classrooms.

In some communities, after school activity centers that provide care for children can be an important venue to engage both parents and children. One medium that is effective in this environment is multi-player role-playing computer games, because they provide a social connection for playing, engage players over longer periods, and do not require expert adult supervision or instruction.

Commercial venues can also be used for dialogues, sometimes with the support of businesses. Shopping malls, cafés, pubs, taverns – and even parks or playgrounds – are familiar and comfortable locations, which provide a meeting place for those who come intentionally for a discussion or who just happen to drop by and become engaged.

In general, sustainable development stories can be communicated through a variety of local processes. The key is to initiate public dialogues in venues familiar and comfortable to local communities. For example, a person or a small panel presents the story in a way that is attuned to the local context. All people present should be encouraged to enter into an open and informal discussion of the ideas. Religious meeting sites, retirement homes, and community activity centers offer another type of venue that reaches some members of a community quite effectively.

The need here is to identify agents of change who are locally based. Finding a locally known and respected person who is or becomes committed to the process of bringing exemplary sustainability narratives into his or her community can be a very powerful factor in engaging the community. Such a person serves to build credibility and access, while maintaining a long-term contact point in the community. One way that such people can be found and recruited is to organize a panel discussion with an outside expert and one or more engaged locals. This often can be done through business clubs, religious organizations, parent organizations at schools, and community recreation centers.

In conclusion, the great challenge is still to reach people, capture their attention, develop their knowledge, increase their capacity and desire for active participation, and – most importantly – listen to and learn from their experiences. A concerted focus on the education of young people is particularly important. One idea is to strengthen the feedback loop between local, national, regional and global leaders, and young people, by drawing them into venues where they wrestle together over the meaning and practices of sustainability. A recent Norwegian initiative undertaken by one of the members of our team<sup>6</sup> - where students challenged business leaders at an international conference - is one model that could be deployed. In this initiative, students confronted business leaders about their response to the sustainability challenge and recorded the encounter on video which was then used as an educational tool. Such an event - mobilizing young generations to critically re-examine and shape our sustainable future - is perhaps one of the most imaginative ways in which to revise the sustainability agenda for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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<sup>6</sup> Atle Midttun, "Students Challenge Business Leaders", Documentary, prod. Piotr Kuzinski, Oslo-Frameline. 2007

## **V. 8 Points of a Sustainable, Humanist Agenda.**

1. Now we say: culture matters. It is time to acknowledge that it is not just political but cultural, ethnic, religious, and civilizational crises that have been pulling the world apart. Similarly it is culture – the stories and images in our heads – that have sanctioned environmental abuse. AS we have argued, telling a compelling story and changing cultural perceptions must be a significant aspect of sustainable development. Culture matters and thus, humans ought not be understood as economic beings driven solely by interest and rationality. Homo œconomicus is not just fictitious; he is unsustainable. We need to recognize the importance of the profound sense of belonging and connection to the earth that people feel, together with the experience of kinship that they have with their fellow non-human travellers.

2. Now we also say: stories matter. We live in the world of politics but we dream in the world of poetics. A humanist agenda for the 21st century needs a less technocratic and more inspiring idiom, one that would not only produce reports but that would inspire transformations in human behaviour. There are countless, world-making, Askeladdian stories out there which need to be unearthed, reinterpreted, or even invented. And then included in education for sustainability.

3. Now we say: history matters – and repeats itself. Our helplessness and ineptitude – in the face of the human and environmental crises in the Balkans, in Rwanda or Darfur – clearly demonstrate that sustainable development is not just about words and knowledge; it is about wisdom and learning from history.

4. Now we say: innovation matters, and as the stakes have increased due to environmental decline, it matters now more than ever. There is a need for resourcefulness which would lead not just to feats of innovation in the developed countries, but which

would export new environmentally friendly technologies to the places which are right now embarking on a project which could include repeating Western mistakes.

5. Now we say: partnership matters. The humanist agenda stems from the ethos of partnership which is not just between business, state and NGOs, but between humanity and nature, men and women, rich and poor. Nature is neither inherently a victim nor a vengeful Gaia, and in the sustainable ethics that we advance, she is our partner in her own right.

6. Now we say: human dignity and justice matter. The humanist agenda goes beyond sustainability understood as a set of techniques and policies and inquires into the well-being of humans and their environment in ways that cannot be measured in economic terms.

7. Now we say: human rights matter. Indeed, some of the earliest understandings of human rights recognized that these were intimately related to the right of access of all people to clean air, water, and the bounty of the earth. While envisaging a sustainable future we cannot ignore the lessons from the chilling anthropology of totalitarian regimes that have specialized in degrading humans to biological material or sacrificed them to higher causes such as class, nation or ethnicity.

8. Now we say: the world is one and there is one humanity. Increasingly we realize that we share our precious existence and that we face a common fate. The most daunting challenges – poverty, malnutrition, diseases, environmental despoliation – must unite all of us. Yet, our capacity to address them is low. The three original Brundtland sustainabilities – economic, social, and ecological – still live parallel lives. They do not *sing* together. What we need is a declaration of interdependence which would be the basis for creating a new Marshall plan on behalf of all humanity. Taking inspiration from one of the most revolutionary documents humanity has produced – *The American Declaration of Independence* – we propose a *Declaration of Interdependence* as a start of a new, sustainable ethics:

*When in the course of human events it becomes necessary for humankind to repair the existing political, economic, and cultural bands, which have divided us from one another and from the Earth, which have also denied us the dignity and well-being to which we aspire, concern for our common future demands that we declare: All life on earth is interdependent.*

*We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all people are endowed with unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the freedom to pursue a meaningful existence. None of these can be enjoyed without the flourishing of life on earth. Whenever any government or enterprise becomes destructive of this end, it is the right of the people to create a better world. Prudence requires that we recognize and reverse the damage that we have done. To replenish the earth's riches is the duty of all people.*